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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 001084

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA
ALSO FOR IO A/S SILVERBERG AND PDAS WARLICK
USUN FOR KHALILZAD/WOLFF/KUMAR
NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/YERGER/GAVITO

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [UNSC](#) [SY](#) [LE](#)
SUBJECT: LEBANON: FM SALLOUKH IS OPTIMISTIC ABOUT
DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH SYRIA

REF: A. (A) BEIRUT 1067
[1](#)B. (B) BEIRUT 1051
[1](#)C. (C) STATE 74879

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. William Grant for reasons 1.4 (b)
and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) Having fully resumed his role as foreign minister, Minister Fawzi Salloukh spoke of Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Moallem's July 21 visit to Beirut as a "positive step forward" in establishing diplomatic relations with Syria. Salloukh, a member of the cabinet committee charged with drafting the ministerial statement, downplayed talk of sharp differences in the committee. He hopes that parliament will vote on the statement on the statement during the week of July 28. Salloukh addressed Charge's point concern about the GOL honoring recently released prisoner Samir Kintar by saying that the GOL honored all of the prisoners, not just Kintar. Salloukh expects President Michel Sleiman to visit Washington before going to New York to speak at the UNGA on September 23. End summary.

SYRIAN FM VISIT
POSITIVE FIRST STEP

[1](#)2. (C) In a July 23 meeting at the MFA, Charge Grant congratulated Foreign Minister Fawzi Salloukh on his ministerial re-appointment and gave him the Secretary's congratulatory letter. Salloukh was much more comfortable than in previous meetings with embassy officials, probably because this was the first meeting with him in his "new status". Salloukh was one of the Shia ministers who resigned the cabinet in November 2006 but he continued to work and make administrative decisions. He was well aware, though, that we dealt with Acting FM Tariq Mitri on substantive matters and avoided meeting with him unless protocol demanded it. Now he is back as the "full" foreign minister in the new Siniora cabinet. While more at ease, Salloukh was not very expansive in his responses on issues raised in the meeting. His views on some issues tracked closely with those of his political sponsor, Parliament speaker Nabih Berri. Salloukh's aide Rami Mourtada, head of the MFA Americas desk Oussama Khachab, and PolOff also attended the meeting.

[1](#)3. (C) Salloukh characterized Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Moallem's July 21 visit as a "positive step forward," adding

that relations between Lebanon and Syria should be normalized. Moallem had two events during his visit, a meeting with Sleiman to deliver an invitation for Sleiman to visit Syria and lunch with Salloukh. Salloukh said that Syrian and Lebanese delegations had hammered out the details for beginning discussions of establishing diplomatic relations while in Paris, following a quadrilateral meeting including French President Nicolas Sarkozy and Qatari Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al Thani.

¶5. (C) Salloukh relayed that other issues discussed in the Paris meetings were demarcation of the border between Lebanon and Syria, security issues, and plans for Sleiman to visit Damascus. After Sleiman's Damascus visit, Salloukh clarified, the two countries would establish a mechanism by which to work out the logistics of initiating diplomatic relations. Salloukh concluded, "What happened in the past is history; it is time for a new page in relations."

"NO OBSTACLES TO
MINISTERIAL STATEMENT"

¶6. (C) A member of the cabinet committee charged with drafting the ministerial statement, Salloukh expressed his hope that the statement would be completed by July 23 or July 24, and that the vote of confidence would take place the week of July 28. Salloukh emphasized that any further delay would cost the cabinet public support. "There are no obstacles up until now," he assured Charge, adding, "There are some items that require further discussion."

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¶7. (C) Salloukh noted that he is requesting that the statement call for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1701. Referencing 1701 would obviate the need for separate language on Sheba'a Farms, he reasoned. (Comment: Salloukh's specific mention of 1701 matches Berri's position, ref tel. End comment.)

GOL HONORED "ALL"
PRISONERS RELEASED
BY ISRAEL

¶8. (C) Charge expressed USG concern at the official welcome given to Samir Kintar after his release from Israeli imprisonment. Salloukh's response was that the celebration was in honor of all of the prisoners released, not just Kintar. He added, "If we scold Kintar for killing a girl, then we would have to ask Israel how many children it killed."

¶9. Charge also made points in ref c demarche urging Lebanon to not support Iranian efforts to exploit the upcoming NAM meeting, which Salloukh will attend. The FM listened and had no substantive response.

SLEIMAN LIKELY TO VISIT
WASHINGTON BEFORE
UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

¶10. (C) Salloukh noted that Sleiman has the date for his UNGA address, September 23, and hopes to visit Washington before then. Salloukh, who will accompany Sleiman to the General Assembly, clarified that Sleiman would not go to New York before September 19, and so would aim to be in Washington before heading to New York.

COMMENT

¶11. (C) Salloukh was clearly more engaged in his FM role than we have seen in previous meetings, but he is still far from

being the key decision maker on foreign policy in the GOL or even in Berri's Amal party group. End comment.

GRANT